

## *A Letter of Bishop McKendree*



William McKendree (1757-1835), was a native of King William County, Virginia, and a veteran of the Revolutionary War, having been present at Yorktown and the surrender of Cornwallis and his army. Converted by the Methodists in 1787, he began traveling as a preacher the next year. In 1796 he was appointed a presiding elder, and in 1808, he was elected the fourth bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The letter, which predates his election to the episcopacy, makes reference to James O'Kelly, who had recently withdrawn from the ME Church in protest over the failure of democratic reform measures he had championed at the General Conference of 1792. This was the first great schism in American Methodism, and at the time this letter was sent, O'Kelly was in the process of establishing his Republican Methodist Church. McKendree had been supportive of O'Kelly's efforts, and even

resigned from the ME Church for a time. This letter, published here for the first time, shows McKendree back in the fold of the ME Church, yet still sympathetic to O'Kelly. It was sent to early Methodist preacher William Watters (1751-1827), and is part of the Thomas E. Bond Collection at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Norfolk, May 10, 1793

D[ea]r Br[other]

An unexpected opportunity offers, and I gladly embrace it to let you know that I have not forgot you & [your] family. I enjoy tolerable health and peace in my own soul. Yet the troubles of the times causes [sic] anxious thoughts. After leaving your house I came to a conclusion for several reasons to take a station. Yet my judgment is not altered concerning our government. Br[other] O'K[elly] is preaching about [*hole in paper*] appears more than ever averse to the new constitution, but as far as I know he is very moderate. I am informed that the local brethren and principal member[s] (above in Charlotte) have held a conference, produced their objections against the gov[ernment], and have sent forth a petition which is to be presented to the bishop. How this is received I have not heard, or what will be the end of these thing[s] the Lord only [knows?]. From the best acc[ount] I get, I find that many of the traveling and local preachers are much dissatisfied, and the members greatly distressed, some preachers stopping (since conference), some complaining and going on very heavily, at which I'm shocked and am fully fearing that these are omens of worse times, even the frowns of Jehovah. My tender love to your dear companion. Excuse inaccuracies for I'm hurried. [I] should be glad to write fuller, but conclude you will fully secure my meaning, being so well acquainted with the matter. Please do write to me. [I] should be very glad to have a statement of the church in your part.

I am thy br[other] in Jes[us]

William McKendree